

# 'I, Too, Am Qualified' Takes On Age Discrimination

---

 [ngazette.com/index.php/latest-issue/2567-i-too-am-qualified-takes-on-age-discrimination](http://ngazette.com/index.php/latest-issue/2567-i-too-am-qualified-takes-on-age-discrimination)

**By Mike McKibbin**      March 13, 2018

Not even 50 years of age, Nancy Fingerhood and Michael Lindenberger found it much harder to land jobs in Colorado than unemployment statistics show.

After months and months and hundreds of job applications without success, the Westminster couple came to believe they were victims of age discrimination. Eventually, Lindenberger found a photography job, while Fingerhood works part-time for a title insurance company and is a substitute teacher.

But their experiences led to the formation of a group to work against ageism, and a Saturday, Feb. 24, meeting with U.S. Rep. Ed Perlmutter (D-Arizona) at Natural Grocers on Kipling Street in Wheat Ridge. They asked him to co-sponsor a bill to help prevent age discrimination in hiring and other employment decisions. Perlmutter agreed several days later.

HR 2650, the Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act, was introduced in May 2017 by U.S. Rep. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-Va). A companion bill, SB 443, was introduced in February 2017 by U.S. Sen. Robert Casey, Jr., (D-Penn.). Both bills were assigned to committees but were not considered.

The bills amend the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 to establish an unlawful employment practice when the complaining party demonstrates that age or participation in investigations, proceedings or litigation under the act was a motivating factor for any unlawful employment practice, despite other possible factors.

Dec. 15., 2017, was the 50th anniversary of the act, aimed at protecting people over 40 from unfair treatment by employers and preventing age-related bias.

"People are not even aware what the (act) is all about," Fingerhood said. "Age discrimination isn't like race, sex or religion. Most people are aware when racial or sexual discrimination happens but not when it comes to age. You can still say things about someone's age that you can't say about their race or their gender."

"Older Americans should be celebrated for their experience and knowledge," Perlmutter said in a March 2 statement. "Discrimination of any kind is unacceptable and this bill would re-establish needed protections for older Americans and ensure they are competitive in the current job market."

## **Starting a movement?**

---

In October 2017, Fingerhood and Lindenberger launched a website and a Twitter account called “I, Too, Am Qualified.” With photographs and statements from people who believe they are victims of age discrimination, it is similar to the “I, Too, Am Oxford” effort that used photography to grow awareness of racism.

The group is taking a three-pronged approach to ageism, Fingerhood said: Social awareness, legislative change and changing overall attitudes and culture.

“We really want to let people know they’re not alone,” Fingerhood stated. “We always hear how low Colorado’s unemployment rate is, but there are a lot of people who have been looking for jobs for a long time and suspect they are victims of age discrimination.”

Lindenberger said his job applications failed to generate any responses until he removed his high school graduation year.

Some of the people on the website live outside Colorado, showing the issue is national in scope and in need of addressing at the federal level, Lindenberger added.

Statistics show that age discrimination complaints are fairly high in Colorado, but few cases are found to have probable cause. And older workers make up a high percentage of the long-term unemployed.

In fiscal year 2017, 27 percent of all Colorado complaints to the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission were age discrimination claims. The state had 2.5 percent of all U.S. age charges filed that fiscal year.

Meanwhile, between 2013 and 2016, the Colorado Civil Rights Division found probable cause that discrimination occurred in just 51 of 1,012 age-related employment complaints.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics noted the nationwide unemployment rate of workers over 55 last July – 3.2 percent – was lower than that of the general population – 4.4 percent. However, 36.4 percent of job seekers 55 years and older were out of work for nearly seven months or longer, compared to 19.3 percent of those under 55.

## **Misconceptions about older workers**

---

During their research, a company that trains business managers about ageism told Fingerhood and Lindenberger younger managers worry older workers “won’t have respect for them or maybe think they know it all,” Fingerhood said.

Older workers expecting to be paid more than a company can afford is another worry, she added. But many older workers don’t have that expectation, Fingerhood said, especially if they are trying to change careers.

Fingerhood said younger workers think older workers can’t – or maybe won’t – adapt to technology. The reality is many older workers realize the value of technology and its importance in nearly every industry, she noted, so they are adept.

Hoping to find a more tangible way to address ageism, Fingerhood and Lindenberger plan to host a March 24 discovery session in their Westminster home, then reach out to businesses, chambers of commerce and other organizations.

“Right now, it’s like we can provide a place for people to vent, but can we go a little further and see if we can make a positive change,” Lindenberger said.

If nothing changes, Lindenberger added, “We’ll start to see the weeding out of the older generations of workers and they’ll have no choice but to take social security and cause bigger demands on taxpayers. When you start to look at the long-term ramifications of this, it seems like it could really get out of control.”